

Spring Statement 2019

This briefing details the RTPI's response to key announcements in the Spring Statement

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Government response to Planning Reform consultation

The Chancellor has announced that, in response to a Government consultation on planning reform, new permitted development rights (PDRs) for change of use and upwards extension of existing buildings will be introduced.

Prior to the Spring Statement, the RTPI wrote to the Housing Minister to reiterate our call for Government to suspend the proposed creation of new PDRs.

We continue to urge the Government to consider the impact these new PDRs would have on local high streets and the quality of housing. We believe they will impair the ability of local authorities to manage development according to the needs of local communities. Indeed, by removing the requirement for a planning application it will exclude the local community from having their say.

Expanding PDRs will neither help deliver thriving local high streets nor high quality, affordable local housing. This is contrary to the spirit and objectives of the Government's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission and will undermine the outcomes of the proposed consultation on Better Planning for High Streets.

More on this from the RTPI:

[RTPI response](#) to the MHCLG consultation 'Planning reform: supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes'

[RTPI: More dead frontages would kill off high streets](#)

Planning for Future High Streets consultation

The Chancellor announced that this new consultation will be published 'in the coming months'. While it is intended, no doubt, to take forward the work of the Future High Streets Forum, the RTPI is concerned that there is a contradiction in its proposed terms.

In the Spring Statement the Government has simultaneously announced that further change of use permitted development rights are to be introduced that will directly impact on the vitality and viability of high streets. Yet this new consultation is intended 'to help local areas make better use of planning tools to support their local high streets'.

The RTPI acknowledges that Compulsory Purchase Orders, Local Development Orders, and 'other innovative planning measures' could help boost town centres – but not at the same time as more extensive change of use rights that eradicate the uses that comprise them counteract and undermine their potential benefit.

The RTPI has long-argued that town centres need a planned-for vision, with holistic objectives and policies agreed and implemented locally by businesses and stakeholders, without the imposition of 'top-down' measures, or further legislative change.

More on this from the RTPI:

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[RTPI response](#) to DCLG technical consultation on planning

[RTPI response](#) to the MHCLG consultation 'Planning reform: supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes'

[RTPI: More dead frontages would kill off high streets](#)

Future Homes Standard

The Chancellor announced a new Future Homes Standard, which would by 2025 mandate the end of fossil fuel heating systems in all new houses, and deliver 'world-leading' levels of energy efficiency.

This announcement is welcome and goes some way to addressing the serious policy gap that resulted from the cancellation of the Zero Carbon Homes standard and weakening of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

However, the UK Government is committed to building around 1.5 million new homes by 2022, and last year, just 1% of new homes built were Energy Performance Certificate band A. Given the urgent need to reduce emissions, the RTPI believes that action needs to be taken much sooner, and cover the retrofitting of the existing housing stock alongside new build.

Government response to the Independent report on Build Out (Letwin Review)

The Chancellor announced that new national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) will be published 'in the coming months', to respond to the Letwin Review's findings on the slow rates of build out on large housing sites and his recommendations on how to increase them.

The stated intention of Government is that the new guidance will support housing diversification on large sites; the Letwin Review concluded specifically that greater differentiation in types and tenures of housing delivered on large sites would increase build out rates of new homes. The RTPI welcomes this additional proposed guidance – and it applying not only to the largest of housing sites.

The Letwin review final report made some further more radical proposals, including suggestions around land value capture. The RTPI is already keeping a close eye on the success of the government's new policy on viability expressed in the NPPF of 2018. We think that for the time being, this is the route to travel but if it does not deliver a clear change of direction on the ground, we would need to see more radical options being considered.

The RTPI believes that if revised national guidance is to be limited to supporting 'diversification', this needs to cover more categories of tenure and the principle of quality design at the very least.

While the RTPI notes the Government's apparent intention, at present, not to take the review's recommendations forward where they have significant resource implications, there is a concern that the opportunity to implement more innovative solutions to the housing crisis will be missed, simply on the basis of a presumption that the longstanding under-resourcing of the planning regime will continue.

More on this from the RTPI:

[Letwin Review: report on build out rate published](#)

[RTPI responds to Letwin report](#)

[RTPI launches new large scale housing development advice](#)

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Accelerated Planning Green Paper

The Chancellor announced that a Green Paper is to be published 'in the coming months' that will set out proposals on 'how greater capacity and capability, performance management and procedural improvements can accelerate the end-to-end planning process'.

The RTPI welcomes the principle underlying this step, in that the Government clearly recognises the need to address the extensive impacts over a long period of time that the under-resourcing of local planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate have had – particularly on housing delivery.

The RTPI welcomes taking forward some of the Rosewell Inquiry report recommendations and the new pilot project for accelerating a small number of inquiry appeals. The RTPI is supportive of the wider approach being taken to resourcing that the Government is apparently taking in the Green Paper. Only by coordinated measures to boost capacity and expertise will there be policy and legislative outcomes that will speed delivery, while ensuring sustainable development.

More on this from the RTPI:

[RTPI response](#) to Independent Review of Planning Inquiries

[RTPI welcomes inquiries review but says more resourcing is needed](#)

[RTPI renews call for more resources for planning in light of NAO report](#)

[Degree apprenticeship for town planners gets green light from Government](#)

National Infrastructure Strategy

The Chancellor reiterated the Government's commitment to respond to the National Infrastructure Commission's National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA) with a National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS).

The RTPI welcome this good news. It suggests that Government has heeded the Institute for Government's calls to build on the NIC's excellent work with a full, cross-government, strategy - rather than a piecemeal point-by-point response.

Indeed, the RTPI has long called a cross-sector, coordinated, spatial, approach to planning infrastructure with housing and employment land at the national level, and the NIS represents a huge opportunity to start doing this.

But for the NIS to be more than a 'shopping list' of projects, like so many of the Government's statements of policy on infrastructure, it must get several things right. The Institute for Government's work on the subject, which the RTPI contributed to, outlines what this must be:

1. It must put forward a vision for how different departments' policies and projects will help meet national objectives
2. It must be explicitly 'spatial' and be based on the unique characteristics of different places
3. It must lay out a roadmap for increasing the capacity of subnational institutions as co-creators and deliverers of the strategy. The eventual aim should be to permanently transfer posts from central government departments responsible for infrastructure to subnational bodies as powers are devolved
4. It must be accessible to the public, and be accompanied by serious efforts at public engagement

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Royal Town Planning Institute

This is a huge opportunity, and while it will take time and political courage to do the above, it is an opportunity not worth missing.

More on this from the RTPI:

[RTPI Map for England project](#)

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